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Special report of the Secretary-General on the review of the mandate of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 29 of Security Council resolution 2318 of 15 November 2016, in which the Council requested that the Secretary-General conduct a strategic review of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA), comprising an in-depth examination of the related resources and structure of its uniformed and civilian components. The present report provides recommendations on how UNISFA should be optimally configured and streamlined, further to an evidence-based assessment of the impact of UNISFA activities aimed at the implementation of its mandate under resolution 2287 (2016).

II. Strategic review

2. The review assessed the ability of UNISFA to fulfil its mandate under Security Council resolutions 1990 (2011), 2024 (2011) and 2318 (2016), considered options for a possible reconfiguration of the Mission based on its findings and engaged with the African Union on the way forward in the political process between the Sudan and South Sudan with respect to Abyei and the implementation of their border security arrangements. The review included an assessment of the ability of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism to implement its mandate and achieve full operating capability. The review follows a similar exercise in April 2014 (see S/2014/336), as a result of which it was determined that supporting the resumption of community dialogue and administration by the communities, under the supervision of the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee, would allow the United Nations to continue meeting its strategic objective of helping to consolidate peace and security in Abyei and create an environment conducive to the resolution of the dispute over the final status of Abyei. Regarding the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism, the 2014 exercise had concluded that, in the absence of full cooperation between the Sudan and South Sudan on border security, the United Nations should not continue investing in its infrastructure.

3. The strategic review mission conducted its field visit from 15 and 23 February 2017. The review team was led by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and included representatives from the Department of Field Support, the Department of Political Affairs, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (on behalf

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of the humanitarian country team) and the United Nations Development Programme, as well as personnel from UNISFA. The review team met with senior officials from the Governments of the Sudan, South Sudan and Ethiopia; representatives of the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya communities; representatives of the African Union, including the Facilitator of the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee; a representative of the African Union High-level Implementation Panel; members of the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee and the African Union Border Programme; and representatives of the United Nations presences in the region (United Nations Office to the African Union, Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Sudan and South Sudan, and the United Nations Mission in South Sudan). The team also engaged with the United Nations country team; representatives of key donors in the Sudan and South Sudan; United Nations agencies, funds and programmes; and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the Abyei Area.

III. Background and findings of the strategic assessment

4. The Security Council adopted resolution 1990 (2011) against a backdrop of increased tensions in the Abyei area at the end of 2010, which had resulted in a series of violent incidents in the area in early January 2011 and a build-up of forces from the north and the south. In the absence of a final agreement on the status of the Abyei Area, temporary security arrangements were agreed upon by the parties to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in January and March 2011. These agreements were implemented only in part, however, and a number of violent incidents occurred in April and May 2011. In response to the situation, the African Union High-level Implementation Panel, with the support of the Government of Ethiopia, the United Nations Mission in the Sudan and other stakeholders, facilitated high-level meetings between the parties to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, which led to the signing of the 20 June 2011 Agreement on temporary arrangements for the administration and security of the Abyei Area.

5. In that context, UNISFA was given the mandate, inter alia, to demilitarize the Abyei Area, to participate in relevant Abyei Area bodies, to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid and the free movement of humanitarian personnel and to strengthen the capacity of the Abyei Police Service. Since its deployment, UNISFA has effectively delivered on its mandated tasks. Despite the slow progress in finding a resolution to the dispute on the final status of Abyei, UNISFA has succeeded in stabilizing the Abyei Area, providing security for the seasonal migration of the Misseriya and facilitating humanitarian assistance.

Political dynamics

6. The political process foreseen in the 20 June 2011 Agreement remains in a state of paralysis. No meaningful progress has been made in the establishment of joint arrangements since the assassination of the Ngok Dinka Paramount Chief on 4 May 2013. The Abyei Joint Oversight Committee — the body with political and administrative oversight over Abyei — has not met since March 2015, creating a political vacuum in the formal joint governance of Abyei. Concurrently, no progress has been made in the resolution of the final status of Abyei since the presentation of the proposal by the African Union High-level Implementation Panel in September 2012, despite President Al-Bashir of the Sudan and President Kiir of South Sudan agreeing to discuss and resolve that matter.

7. At the heart of the paralysis is the stance taken by the parties regarding their respective positions on the current and future status of Abyei. Neither side has

demonstrated a willingness to contemplate the concessions necessary for a political solution. In the meantime, both are preoccupied by internal situations (Darfur and the Two Areas for the Sudan and the armed conflict in South Sudan) that are of higher national priority than the administration or the future of Abyei. The result is a long-term deadlock which compels UNISFA to perform its mandated role as the guarantor of security in Abyei while also improvising the crafting of ad hoc solutions to the administrative and law and order demands of Abyei.

8. The Sudan insists that the literal terms of the 20 June 2011 Agreement are the sole frame of reference for Abyei and that, accordingly, Abyei remains a part of the Sudan unless "the 1 January 1956 line between the north and the south" is "changed as a result of the outcome of the referendum foreseen in the Abyei Protocol or other decision of the Parties on the final status of Abyei". The insistence of the Sudan that the establishment of a joint administration is a sine qua non for addressing all Abyei issues effectively precludes recourse to alternative channels for discussion and negotiation. This, in turn, provides justification for the Sudan to retain the presence of armed personnel in the Diffra oil complex, in violation of the 20 June 2011 Agreement.

9. For its part, South Sudan ascribes prime importance to the July 2009 ruling by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in the Hague, which is "final and binding" on the parties and which, in its view, constitutes the most authoritative pronouncement on the borders of Abyei, namely an affirmation that, under international law, the Abyei Area is conterminous with the boundaries of the areas over which the nine Ngok Dinka chiefdoms exercise their traditional prerogative. On 31 October 2016, in commemoration of the third anniversary of the unilateral referendum held in the Abyei Area, around 700 Ngok Dinka led by the Paramount Chief demonstrated in front of UNISFA headquarters in Abyei and handed over a petition letter calling for recognition of the referendum.

10. The deadlock in the implementation of the 20 June 2011 Agreement leaves UNISFA, which is intended as an "interim" mission, in a state of limbo. As there is no clear prospect of a peaceful resolution of the status of Abyei, UNISFA also lacks an exit horizon.

11. At the community level, both the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya community leaders expressed a desire for peaceful coexistence. Nevertheless, they continue to blame each other's Governments for failing to implement the 20 June 2011 Agreement, and each accuses the United Nations of bias towards the other. The Misseriya leaders criticized the international community, including the United Nations and NGOs, for a perceived general lack of support, as well as lack of access to funding for water, road and other projects. They expressed concerns regarding access to natural resources in southern Abyei, to Abyei Town and to their homes in Abyei, as well as the lack of formal administration and a police service. They requested assistance to enable the safe return to Abyei of 287 Misseriya families who they stated had been displaced to Muglad and Khartoum during the conflict in 2011. The Misseriya leaders called for the issue of the final status of Abyei to be resolved.

12. The Ngok Dinka maintained that shared sovereignty over Abyei was of critical importance and criticized the United Nations for allegedly favouring Sudanese sovereignty over Abyei. They also raised the issues of the armed Sudanese personnel at the Diffra oil complex and the presence of armed criminals in Abyei, while voicing support for the work of the community protection committees. The Ngok Dinka also were of the view that there had not been sufficient development projects in their community. The unresolved killing of the Ngok Dinka Paramount

Chief in 2013 was mentioned as a serious concern that hindered peaceful coexistence with the Misseriya.

Security

13. Senior officials in the Sudan, South Sudan and Ethiopia were unanimous in affirming that UNISFA had successfully fulfilled its security mandate and applauded the Mission for establishing and maintaining a significant degree of stability in Abyei. All interlocutors expressed the shared view that, in the present circumstances and as long as the status of Abyei remained contested, the withdrawal of UNISFA, or any weakening in its military strength or posture, could lead to heightened tensions between the Sudan and South Sudan, with dire consequences for both countries and for the wider region. Although both the Sudan and South Sudan assigned high political, strategic and economic importance to Abyei, the presence of UNISFA forces rendered highly unlikely the possibility of any major confrontation.

14. The security situation in the Abyei Area remains unpredictable but calm, owing primarily to the robust and proactive military deployment concept employed by UNISFA. Since 2015, the annual migration season, from October to mid-May, which is traditionally the time of highest intercommunal tensions and conflict, has been largely peaceful thanks to the Mission's implementation of its flexible conflict management and mitigation strategy, involving the armed enforcement of a line of disengagement between the Misseriya and Ngok Dinka communities, in close consultation with the communities themselves. The establishment of community protection committees in southern Abyei has also served to strengthen community-oriented crime prevention. Nevertheless, community protection committees have not been established in northern Abyei owing to reservations on the part of the Sudan. The revival of traditional systems of sharing resources and the reinitiation of a peace dialogue between the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya communities has also contributed to improving the security situation, as the two communities, with support from UNISFA, agencies, funds, programmes and NGOs, have embraced self-regulation, peaceful coexistence and non-violent resolution of disputes through dialogue.

15. Despite the relative calm achieved by the conflict management and mitigation strategy and the vigorous posture of UNISFA, the security context is still vulnerable to a number of risk factors. These include the law and order vacuum created by the absence of the Abyei Police Service and formal criminal justice institutions, the potential for increased frequency of violent intercommunal crime fuelled by the prevalence of small arms and light weapons, and the continued threat of landmines and explosive remnants of war. A further risk is the fact that both the Sudan and South Sudan continue to violate aspects of the 20 June 2011 Agreement and related Security Council resolutions through the presence of armed personnel within the Abyei Area. The Sudan continues to maintain between 120 and 150 armed personnel around the Diffra oil complex, while incursions by armed personnel, suspected to be members of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), continue to be observed in the southern parts of the Abyei Area.

16. The proximity of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and SPLA forces just outside the boundaries of the Abyei Area underlines the continuing strategic importance of Abyei to both the Sudan and South Sudan. It also points to the risk that local conflict between the Misseriya and the Ngok Dinka communities could escalate into a larger confrontation. That risk was acknowledged by senior officials of both the Sudan and South Sudan during the strategic review mission. The presence of UNISFA was, therefore, explicitly recognized as a deterrent to armed conflict, as well as an effective security buffer between the two communities. With

the persisting political instability and armed conflict in South Sudan, the potential effects of the spread of fighting into the Abyei Area should not be overlooked.

Humanitarian situation

17. The humanitarian situation has remained relatively stable in the absence of large-scale clashes and displacement in the Abyei Area. Nevertheless, the presence of armed elements, sporadic intercommunal conflict and the absence of public institutions and government services continue to drive humanitarian and recovery needs. Approximately 160,000 people are in need of some form of assistance in the Abyei Area, and 20,000 Ngok Dinka remain displaced after fleeing south of the Kiir/Bahr-el-Arab River in 2011. Since April 2016, some 13,000 Ngok Dinka have returned to their areas of origin as a result of a gradual improvement in the security situation, though many continue to commute to areas further south to access education and other services. Many have settled very close to the UNISFA company operating bases. In addition, approximately 8,000 people displaced from neighbouring areas in South Sudan because of basic food needs and insecurity remain in the Abyei Area and receive humanitarian assistance across all sectors. The failure by the parties to establish the Abyei Area Administration, and the resulting sense of insecurity, have hampered governance, the rule of law and the sustainable provision of public services, presenting a considerable impediment to the sustainable return of displaced persons. In addition to the Ngok Dinka, there are approximately 25,000 Misseriya in the north of Abyei and 35,000 seasonally nomadic Misseriya who entered the area in late 2016 and are expected to return in mid-2017.

18. Funding for humanitarian activities is scarce, including in the health sector, and engagement is mostly limited to humanitarian assistance, except for quick-impact projects that are allocated by UNISFA. The International Organization for Migration, often in collaboration with international NGOs, helps with the implementation of quick-impact projects. The activities of international NGOs (funded directly by donors or through United Nations agencies) cover all sectors, including nutrition, water, sanitation, hygiene and livelihoods. These activities are conducted almost entirely in the central and southern parts of Abyei. Some United Nations agencies and two national NGOs are able to operate in northern Abyei, with support focused on the rehabilitation of public buildings/facilities and water points, community livelihoods and vaccination of livestock.

19. Communities returning to Abyei and internally displaced persons from South Sudan are particularly vulnerable, since few systems are in place to support them. The unemployment rate in Abyei is extremely high, especially among young people, who see very few prospects for the future. Some international NGOs, in collaboration with United Nations agencies, work on reconciliation, including by facilitating conferences on migration prior to the migration season to prevent conflict between the Misseriya and Dinka communities. These efforts have been successful.

Protection of civilians and human rights

20. The mandate of UNISFA includes a role in human rights monitoring and addressing sexual and gender-based violence and child rights. There has been no progress, however, in the operationalization of the human rights monitoring and reporting mandate in the Abyei Area, as called for by the Security Council in its

resolutions 2318 (2016), 2287 (2016), 2251 (2015) and 2156 (2014), because of the non-issuance of visas by the Government of the Sudan.

21. Women and children, in particular, face human rights risks in Abyei. The number of unaccompanied children and children living on the streets has grown with the conflict in South Sudan. Although most have continued to seek safety in the Sudan, a general lack of protection mechanisms to address issues relating to unaccompanied children continues to put many children at risk of violence, exploitation, abuse, abduction and recruitment. Operationalization of the monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave violations against children remains a challenge owing to access difficulties and limited capacity on the ground.

22. The human rights situation in the Abyei Area is exacerbated by the absence of a functional criminal justice system and rule of law institutions. Aside from traditional justice mechanisms, there is no functioning formal judicial system in the Abyei Area and the existing makeshift detention facilities are in poor condition.

IV. Status of mandate implementation

23. The review team considered each of the mandated tasks set out in paragraph 1 of Security Council resolution 2318 (2016), with references to relevant paragraphs of Security Council resolutions 1990 (2011), 2024 (2011) and 2075 (2012).

Monitoring and verifying the redeployment of the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Sudan People's Liberation Army from the Abyei Area, and enforcing demilitarization

24. UNISFA is accomplishing to a large extent its mandated task of monitoring and verifying the redeployment of SAF and SPLA from the Abyei Area. Those forces have mostly withdrawn, enabling UNISFA to dominate the Abyei Area militarily. The exceptions to full accomplishment of this task are the continued presence of Sudanese armed personnel in the Diffra oil complex and occasional incursions from South Sudan into Abyei by unauthorized elements, including SPLA. The strategic review noted that, in the current circumstances, such violations do not constitute any significant threat to security in Abyei and do not in themselves undermine the relative calm facilitated by the UNISFA forces.

25. With regard to demilitarization, UNISFA successfully enforces a security regime which prohibits openly carrying or displaying firearms of any kind. The prohibition is enforced through the swift and robust confiscation of any weapons that are visible and the systematic destruction of weapons seized, utilizing the technical support and equipment of the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS). Approximately 125 weapons and over 8,000 rounds of small arms ammunition have been destroyed at the UNISFA/UNMAS weapons and ammunition management facility at Dukra. Mine risk education is also delivered to UNISFA civilian personnel, military observers, military and United Nations agency personnel and local communities, including nomadic herdsmen and returnees.

Participation in Abyei Area bodies

26. The ability of UNISFA to participate in Abyei Area bodies is dependent on the establishment and functioning of the Abyei Area Administration, the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee, the Abyei Police Service, the Joint Military Observer Committee, the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism and other

bodies foreseen by the 20 June 2011 Agreement. UNISFA has actively participated in the nine meetings of the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee that have been held so far and continues to participate in, and contribute to, the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism.

Mine action activities

27. Since 2011, UNMAS has provided support for the protection of civilians, personnel of UNISFA, and humanitarian relief and development actors, allowing UNIFSA and its partners to rapidly deploy and enabling internally displaced persons to safely return to their homes. Additionally, it surveys, verifies and clears UNISFA and Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism border access and patrol routes and clears priority areas and explosive threats in the Mission area. UNMAS patrol support teams remain in a state of readiness to deploy in support of the Mechanism's ground patrols at both sector headquarters in Kadugli, Sudan, and in Gok Machar, South Sudan. Since its deployment, UNMAS has cleared some 957 km of roads and 2 million m^2 of land within the Abyei Area from explosive hazards, enabling the safe delivery of humanitarian aid.

Facilitating the delivery of humanitarian aid

28. UNISFA supports the work of agencies, funds and programmes, as well as a number of national and international humanitarian organizations currently operating in Abyei, including through mine clearance, as described above. Nevertheless, restrictions imposed by the Government of the Sudan on NGOs limit the implementation capacity of humanitarian and development actors, especially in northern parts of Abyei. Additional challenges include lack of adequate funds, high implementation costs owing to security and logistical constraints, delays in the issuance of travel permits and delays in the movement of personnel and supplies by the Government of the Sudan. Poor road conditions impede the delivery of aid and the movement of personnel. Efforts to bring in badly needed education and health staff are impeded by high costs and political sensitivities. The conflict in South Sudan has had an impact on humanitarian operations in Abyei, as illustrated by the temporary relocation of international staff, the looting of and the charging of high prices for supplies procured in South Sudan and delays in the activities of NGOs supported by South Sudan offices, particularly those based in Agok.

Supporting the capacity of the Abyei Police Service, the policing function and intercommunal engagement

29. The 20 June 2011 Agreement and relevant Security Council resolutions define the policing functions of UNISFA in terms of support, capacity-building and training for the Abyei Police Service. To engage with these tasks, Security Council resolution 1990 (2011) provides for a ceiling of 50 police personnel for the police contingent of UNISFA, of which only 20 are currently deployed owing to the failure by the Government of the Sudan to issue visas for police personnel. As the Abyei Police Service has not been established, there is currently no opportunity for UNISFA police to perform their support and capacity-building role as originally envisaged.

30. The lack of criminal justice and rule of law institutions makes it impossible to effectively prosecute intercommunal crimes and to protect and promote the rights of individuals, and has contributed to a culture of impunity, with victims and witnesses

reluctant to report violations and abuses. This notwithstanding, UNISFA police have found innovative ways to play a critical role in partially filling the law and order vacuum. The strategic review observed that UNISFA police had made a positive difference through their direct engagement in promoting peaceful coexistence between the Misseriya and Ngok Dinka communities. That work had contributed to ensuring the safety of Abyei residents by mitigating the risks associated with the seasonal migration of the Misseriya towards the southern part of Abyei, and to the fact that a number of Misseriya were settling in Abyei on a permanent basis.

31. In the absence of the Abyei Police Service, UNISFA has worked to strengthen the capacities of community protection committees to assist with the management of law and order processes. UNISFA restricts its support to facilitating community protection committees as unarmed neighbourhood watch mechanisms. Despite the objection of the Sudan to the establishment of community protection committees in northern Abyei, UNISFA continues to engage with the Sudan in an attempt to persuade it to permit a similar mechanism in the Misseriya community. While challenges remain in expanding the concept to the northern parts of Abyei, the community protection committees in the Ngok Dinka areas have become an effective, albeit informal, community-based policing mechanism, endorsed by the Security Council in its resolution 2205 (2015).

32. UNISFA has worked to promote confidence-building measures between the communities through facilitating reconciliation processes at the grass-roots level. It has also encouraged the parties to promote community dialogue by convening a peace conference between the traditional chiefs of the Ngok Dinka and the Misseriya, which served as a catalyst to renew dialogue between the two communities. A common market now flourishing in Amiet is a visible symbol of improved intercommunity relations, although a simmering dispute about the future location of the market could potentially spark violence.

33. In the absence of formal detention facilities, individuals suspected of committing major crimes have been transferred outside of Abyei and handed over to the relevant Government. Minor crimes are adjudicated by traditional courts in the Abyei Area. Community protection committees oversee informal detention facilities in Abyei town, Agok and the Amiet market for the short-term detention of suspects. UNISFA has deployed two police officers with correctional backgrounds to advise and assist the committees in providing detention facilities that are safe and humane, and to focus on mediation, reconciliation and other alternatives to the use of detention, where appropriate. These officers are instrumental in increasing the awareness and skills of the committees and in contributing to the strengthening of existing informal law and order mechanisms. The Mission's corrections capacity is, however, unable to effectively cover all relevant detention facilities (in Abyei Town, Agok and the Amiet market).

34. Other actions taken to address policing functions include the co-location of United Nations Police (UNPOL) with the Agok community protection committee, which is supported by approximately 21 unarmed South Sudan National Police Service personnel to address issues relating to law and order. The police component provides support and advice to the UNISFA Force Commander and the military component on public order management and community security issues within the Abyei Area. UNPOL also conducts joint police and military community-based interactive patrols to monitor issues related to public order, participates in meetings of the joint security committee with members of both communities regarding peace and stability, and advises young people, elders and traditional leaders on law and order through community policing outreach programs.

Security-related tasks

35. Thanks to the robust deployment of UNISFA, day and night patrolling and timely response to incidents, many armed incidents have either been prevented or had their impact minimized. The military deployment to cope with the security consequences of political deadlock has been influenced by climatic conditions, migration patterns, areas of settlement and infrastructure and logistical constraints.

36. During the rainy season, UNISFA troops are deployed along the main supply road with two other company operating bases in Tajale and Marial Achak, which were developed as permanent camps to effectively protect communities and returnees in those areas. As a temporary risk-mitigation measure, three corridors on the north-south axis were designated for seasonal migration of the three major Misseriya subclans: the Awlad Kamil and Fayyarin, the Mazaghna (Muzama), and the Omran and Fadliya. The objective of the corridors is to prevent conflict among the Misseriya clans, and also between Dinka and Misseriya populations, without imposing physical separation of these communities.

Safe Demilitarized Border Zone and responsibilities of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism

37. The mandate of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism to assist the parties in ensuring the observance of the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone has made progress only relatively recently. During a 14 October 2015 meeting, the parties verbally agreed on a centre line for the Zone, following which a meeting of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism was held on 5 June 2016. Operational activities of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism, such as ground monitoring or the establishment of team sites, have been affected by delays in obtaining approvals for ground movement, although on 21 January 2017 the Sudan granted approval for a joint reconnaissance mission to Buram. On 23 January, South Sudan approved a reconnaissance mission to Malakal, including ground patrols. The Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism continues to facilitate liaison between the parties and builds mutual trust. Nevertheless, the parties have yet to invite the Mechanism to participate in developing effective bilateral management mechanisms along the border or to provide support to ad hoc committees outside the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone.

38. The 5 June 2016 meeting of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism led to some positive developments for the mandate of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism. The Sudan authorized its senior national monitor to approve the scheduled aerial monitoring patrols, and also granted approval for the ground monitoring missions. Aerial monitoring missions from Gok Machar were recently approved by South Sudan. Reconnaissance missions to the proposed sector headquarters in Buram have recently been conducted with consent from both parties. In November 2016, both the Sudan and South Sudan announced their withdrawal from the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone. The Sudan has formally requested the African Union and UNISFA to verify its claim. These activities and developments are welcome; however, they fall short of the Security Council benchmarks for the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism to reach full operating capability. Given the political paralysis regarding the future of Abyei, it is unlikely that the benchmarks will be met in the medium term. Accordingly, for the coming period, it is recommended that the Mechanism be authorized and resourced to function at its present interim operating capacity.

39. The effectiveness of aerial patrols is severely hampered by the lack of air assets with the necessary capabilities of range and adequate air-to-ground visibility. Helicopters are particularly poorly suited to air-to-ground surveillance. Furthermore, during the wet season, ground patrols are heavily constrained by a lack of mobility, and the demining of key ground routes is suspended throughout the area of operations in the light of UNMAS standing down during this period. The review team discussed with both parties the need to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of aerial patrols by deploying, within existing budget ceilings, a fixed-wing aircraft fitted with imaging technology to increase the situational awareness and visibility of the area of operations. Both the Sudan and South Sudan welcomed the suggestion and agreed to commence formal discussions on the proposal.

Force configuration, equipment and staffing

40. The 2015 military capability study found that the authorized military strength of UNISFA of 5,326 was appropriate to implement its mandate in Abyei and with respect to the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism, and stressed that any reduction in troop numbers would seriously hamper the Mission's ability to continue to secure the situation and prevent conflict between the two communities or a wider escalation that could involve the two countries. Reference was made to the size of the Abyei Area, the lack of infrastructure, the challenging terrain and the additional requirement to execute policing tasks. The strategic review reaffirmed those findings in the light of the current situation as grounds for maintaining UNISFA strength at current levels to enable it to protect civilians, humanitarian personnel and operations, to continue implementing its multifaceted conflict mitigation strategy and to ensure the safety and security of the Misseriya and Ngok Dinka communities, including during the migration season, as well as work with the parties and maintain the dialogue on the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone through the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism.

41. In the light of the vulnerabilities of the Misseriya in the north-western migration corridor, operational adjustments are required to enhance the protection role of UNISFA, including through the establishment of additional bases in the north-western migration corridor, all of which will be undertaken with the authorized ceiling.

42. When considering all options for enhanced efficiency, mention must be made of the recommendation of the military capability study to repatriate tank and artillery units in order to generate two additional force reserve companies. That recommendation was explored as a cost-saving measure but was not pursued further, as the net savings were minimal. Furthermore, and as stressed by Ethiopia, the strategic and deterrent value of the tank and artillery units in Abyei should be borne in mind. That value outweighs any cost considerations.

43. The scope for Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism activity is significantly limited by the paralysis in the political process. As already mentioned, the Mechanism should be supported at its present interim operating capacity for the coming period. Currently, 557 troops are deployed for force protection in Kadugli and Gok Machar. It is recommended to continue the suspension of the deployment of the remaining two companies that are foreseen to bring the Mechanism to full operational capacity. To enable the currently deployed force to capitalize on further progress between the parties, the aerial surveillance capacity of the Mechanism should be enhanced within existing resources, by deploying fixed-wing aircraft with advanced imaging and visibility capabilities.

44. Recruitment to UNISFA has been severely hampered by delays in the issuance, and by the non-issuance, of visas. Steps will be taken by UNISFA to fill all existing vacancies in its staffing table, including for positions such as principal officer, community liaison officers and human rights officers. This will enhance its capacity to fulfil vital political, coordination, protection and community-relations functions. Efforts to fill these positions will require the Sudan to grant visa approvals, including to community liaison officers.

45. Considerable progress has been made in improving the living and working conditions of UNISFA staff, in refurbishing and upgrading the accommodations, with special attention paid to the needs of female staff, as well as to improving the staff welfare and recreation facilities. Drainage systems have been improved to avoid the flooding of airfields, roads and vulnerable parts of the accommodation areas. With the acquisition of the land adjacent to the existing Mission headquarters site, the current helicopter parking and landing sites will be relocated farther away from the residential areas, thus making the camp safer. The ongoing construction of the perimeter fence, additional guard towers and the installation of closed-circuit television systems will greatly enhance the safety and security of the premises. The living and working conditions in Kadugli and other team sites visited have been upgraded and are in good condition. Nevertheless, there is a general need to develop more all-weather roads in the Abyei Area and to expedite the installation of wastewater treatment plants throughout the Mission area that fully comply with United Nations environmental standards.

V. Observations

46. It is regrettable that the Governments of the Sudan and South Sudan have made no further progress in the implementation of the 20 June 2011 Agreement, including the establishment of the joint interim institutions: the Abyei Area Administration, the Abyei Area Council and the Abyei Police Service. There has also been no significant progress on the border monitoring mechanism. The relative calm achieved by UNISFA should ideally have served as a foundation on which meaningful political processes would be based, joint arrangements and public services would function, and humanitarian, recovery and development initiatives would take root to benefit all of the people and residents of Abyei. The reality, however, is that the Sudan and South Sudan have thus far failed to grasp the political and development opportunities afforded by the effectiveness of UNISFA in Abyei.

47. All interlocutors unanimously commended UNISFA for successfully maintaining security in Abyei, and reaffirmed its value in creating stability in the Area, calling for further extensions of the mandate of UNISFA. There was also consensus that the 20 June 2011 Agreement was moribund. Without a breakthrough, the political processes that should drive its implementation were in a state of atrophy, the joint administrative arrangements foreseen in the Agreement were not likely to be established in the medium term and, in the current regional context, the Sudan and South Sudan had little inclination to engage constructively on resolving the question of the future of Abyei. Against that backdrop, the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee, which should be the primary mechanism through which the parties amicably resolved joint issues, had itself become a forum for confrontation.

48. In the face of intractable paralysis in implementing the 20 June 2011 Agreement, the people of Abyei are left with a variety of unfulfilled needs. These include formal administrative, policing and rule of law institutions, as well as the provision of education, health care, sanitation and clean water, and other public and human development services and humanitarian assistance. In the resulting

governance void, the expectations placed on the Mission are high, and UNISFA has been compelled to respond by improvising to partially compensate for the absence of joint institutions. In so doing, the Mission has utilized its capabilities in pragmatic, constructive ways to serve the needs of the people of Abyei and advance security conditions, including through activities that fall outside the literal provisions of the original mandate of UNISFA. This practical approach is exemplified by the work of UNISFA civilian staff; UNISFA military staff, through liaison officers and meetings of the joint security committee; and UNPOL, in supporting initiatives that promote intercommunal dialogue and harmony and in developing and supporting the practice of community policing through the community protection committees.

The imperative of reviving political efforts

49. The inflexible political positions of the Sudan and South Sudan, which are often mirrored in the stances taken by the high-level Misseriya and Ngok Dinka community leaders, remain the principal impediment to progress on the Abyei issue. Both Governments must demonstrate a new spirit of compromise and mutual accommodation to break the deadlock. They must be requested to enhance their facilitation of UNISFA operations, and to ensure that all operational obstacles faced by UNISFA are removed, including issues related to the Athony airport. The influence of the Government of the Sudan on the Misseriya and the Government of South Sudan on the Ngok Dinka must be exercised in constructive ways that advance intercommunal harmony and peaceful coexistence, and ensure the participation of both communities in UNISFA community policing efforts.

50. In this regard, the conflict over Abyei is fundamentally a political problem that requires a political solution. Growing instability in South Sudan and the remaining challenges posed by unresolved issues relating to the Darfur region, and South Kordofan and Blue Nile States, in the Sudan, have served to distract international attention from Abyei, leaving it with an uncertain future. The revival of meaningful political efforts is essential and, in this regard, the role of the African Union in resuscitating the dialogue between the Sudan and South Sudan over Abyei is paramount. UNISFA will continue to lend the support necessary to the effort of the African Union, in collaboration with the Office of the Special Envoy for the Sudan and South Sudan, to actively engage at the highest levels with the Governments of both countries, with a view to restarting political dialogue on Abyei and to creating conditions conducive to resuming the meetings of the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee. This should be the basis for further joint meetings that address outstanding issues of mutual interest to the Sudan and South Sudan.

51. Alongside renewing political engagement with the parties, the United Nations will continue to work with the Facilitator of the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee in his liaison and coordination role by addressing to the responsible Government the operational challenges faced by the Mission.

The need for development and humanitarian assistance

52. Interlocutors conveyed the strongly held view that humanitarian and development assistance was urgently required to build the resilience of local communities, to promote self-reliance, to lessen dependence on international support and to contribute to stability and calm in Abyei. Ensuring access to health care, providing primary and vocational education, establishing livelihood programmes and continuing the provision of support to the local security committees will help

maintain peace, minimize recourse to crime and strengthen community cohesion. The investment and support provided to local community security arrangements are bearing fruit and serve as a good example of how relatively low-cost development initiatives can make a difference. To sustain current achievements, coordinated engagement is required from the United Nations country teams and NGOs in both the Sudan and South Sudan, with each agency contributing according to its comparative advantage. Also required is enhanced coordination between UNISFA and humanitarian and development actors to maximize the impact of projects and programmes.

53. United Nations agencies, funds and programmes and NGOs should also redouble their efforts to mobilize funding and resources for programmes in the Abyei Area and give particular attention to the need for recovery and development projects and public services, as they are required to consolidate stability and calm.

54. Additionally, enhanced coordination with regard to monitoring and reporting on human rights violations and potential threats to the civilian population; strengthened efforts to ensure the protection of children, including through the establishment of the monitoring and reporting mechanism; and the formulation of a structured, inter-agency approach to tackling sexual and gender-based violence, must be priorities. Closer coordination is also required between UNISFA and humanitarian and recovery actors, both at the field level and in the Juba and Khartoum United Nations country teams.

Policing functions

55. It is clear that the formation of the Abyei Police Service is not likely in the short or medium term, and that suspending all current policing work pending the establishment of a joint police service will effectively defer such work indefinitely. It is equally clear that the community protection committees, despite their highly commendable achievements, cannot, as informal organizations of unpaid volunteers, be relied upon to bear full or long-term responsibility for policing functions in Abyei. The Government of the Sudan must be urged to routinely approve visas in order to maintain the authorized ceiling of 50 police officers. While the recent granting of visas for 10 UNPOL officers is welcome, the Sudan must ensure that visa approvals for all staff members of UNISFA and the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism are regularly and rapidly granted.

Opportunities to promote intercommunal harmony

56. In contrast to the political deadlock at the Juba and Khartoum level, and in the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee and other joint institutions, community-level relationships between the Ngok Dinka and the Misseriya communities demonstrate great potential for deepening mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence at the local level. There is an urgent need, therefore, to strengthen the community liaison function, particularly considering the fact that the promotion of intercommunal harmony contributes to reducing crime and to enhancing the protective environment. In this regard, there is a need to prevail upon the Government of the Sudan to routinely approve visas and related permits for community liaison officers.

VI. General recommendations

57. Senior officials in the Sudan and South Sudan and other interlocutors of the review team underlined that, in the current regional context, the continued presence

of UNISFA remains critical. Any weakening of its strength would be ill advised, as this could trigger severe consequences for the security and stability of the Abyei Area, with regional repercussions.

58. Accordingly, I recommend the extension of the mandate of UNISFA for a further period of six months, along with the implementation of the proposals contained in paragraphs 38, 39, 43 and 56 of the present report. The Mission as it currently stands is optimally suited to successfully discharge the security and other aspects of its mandate. While the accomplishments of UNISFA must be acknowledged, the Sudan and South Sudan must also recognize that an open-ended mandate is indefensible.

59. In conclusion, I wish to extend my gratitude and appreciation to Major-General Hassen Ebrahim Mussa, the former Acting Head of Mission and Force Commander of UNISFA, and to Brigadier General Zewdu Kiros Gebrekidan, Officer-in-Charge of UNISFA during the period of the review, for their efforts to enhance peace and stability in the Abyei Area, often under very difficult conditions. I also commend the Special Envoy for the Sudan and South Sudan, Nicholas Haysom; the Head of the United Nations Office to the African Union in Addis Ababa, Haile Menkerios; the African Union, including the African Union High-level Implementation Panel; and the Government of Ethiopia, for their active engagement in support of the stabilization of the Abyei Area.